

## Helping Students Get Ready to Learn

Promoting healthy behaviors among students is an important part of the fundamental mission of schools: to help young people acquire the knowledge and skills to become healthy and productive adults. By promoting healthy behaviors, schools can increase students' capacity to learn, reduce absences, and improve physical fitness and mental alertness.

To help schools meet this challenge, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has developed the School Health Index. This self-assessment and planning tool will enable you to:

- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your school's health promotion policies and programs.
- Develop an action plan for improving student health.
- Involve teachers, parents, students, and the community in improving school services.

## Focusing on Key Health Behaviors: Physical Activity and Healthy Eating

The following six health risk behaviors are largely responsible for the leading causes of death and illness among young people and adults in the United States:

- Physical inactivity.
- Poor eating habits.
- Tobacco use.
- Sexual behaviors that result in HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases, or unintended pregnancy.

- Behaviors that result in intentional or unintentional injury.
- Abuse of alcohol and other drugs.

Because these behaviors are often established in childhood, positive choices need to be promoted early in life. The first version of the School Health Index addresses physical activity and healthy eating. Future versions will also address other key health behaviors.

## Here Are the Facts . . .

- Regular physical activity helps build and maintain healthy bones and muscles and reduce fat, but nearly half of young people aged 12–21 years do not engage in physical activity on a regular basis.
- Research suggests that skipping breakfast can affect children's intellectual performance, and even moderate undernutrition can have lasting effects on cognitive development. Children who are hungry are more likely to have behavioral, emotional, and academic problems at school.
- Less than one in three children and adolescents meets dietary recommendations for limiting intake of saturated fat, less than one in five eats enough fruits and vegetables, and less than one in five adolescent girls has an adequate intake of calcium.
- The percentage of children and adolescents who are overweight has almost doubled since 1980: about 11% are now overweight. Overweight children are more likely to have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and high insulin levels. They are also more likely to become overweight adults, who are at increased risk for heart disease and diabetes.

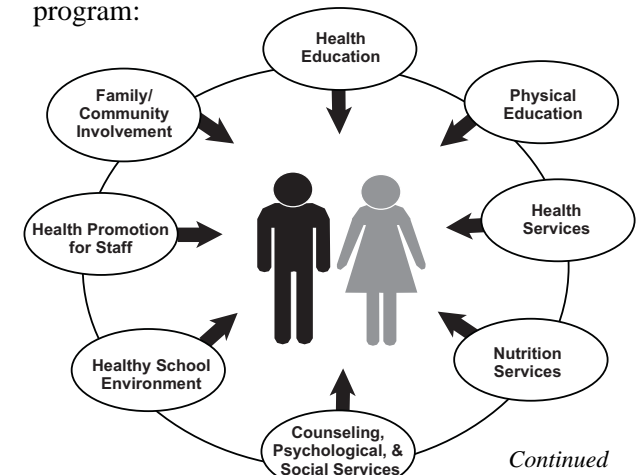
## What the School Health Index Can Do for Your School

The School Health Index will provide structure and direction to your school's efforts to improve health promotion policies and programs. School administrators and staff who have used the Index have said:

- *"The School Health Index was easy to use and enabled us to clearly identify what is working and what needs to be improved."*
- *"It's a real energizer—it makes you think of ideas that are relatively easy to implement."*
- *"The school staff had a very positive attitude toward the Index. They liked its comprehensive view of health promotion and its involvement of many different stakeholders."*
- *"The School Health Index can help every school become a center for a healthier, more physically fit community."*

## How the School Health Index Works

The physical activity and eating habits of students are influenced by the entire school environment, not just the cafeteria and gymnasium. Therefore, the Index has eight different modules, each corresponding to a component of a coordinated school health program:



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A team made up of members of different groups within the school—parents, teachers, students, administrators, and other staff—and concerned community members is responsible for completing a questionnaire for each module. Responses to each questionnaire are scored to help you identify your school's strengths and weaknesses. The School Health Index also includes a Planning for Improvement section that helps schools use their Index scores to develop an action plan for each module and for the school as a whole.

The School Health Index is available at no cost and can be completed in as little as 5 hours. Many of the improvements that you'll want to make after completing the Index can be done with existing staff and resources. A small investment of time can pay big dividends in improving students' well-being, readiness to learn, and prospects for a healthy life.

**To obtain a copy of the School Health Index, choose one of the following options:**

- Download from CDC web sites:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash>  
or  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa>
- Request by e-mail: [ccdinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:ccdinfo@cdc.gov)
- Call the CDC Division of Adolescent and School Health Resource Room:  
770-488-3168
- Request by toll-free fax: 888-282-7681

When ordering, please specify either the elementary school version or the middle school/high school version.

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**  
Centers for Disease Control  
and Prevention (CDC)  
Atlanta, GA 30333

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## A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide



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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention